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The Mystery of the Fire-Ship; OR, A BRAVE BOY Sailing - Master.

By ROGER STARBUCK.

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The Mystery of the Fire-Ship:

OR,

A Brave Boy Sailing-Master.

By ROGER STARBUCK,

Author of "Chums to the Death; or, The Adventures of a Boy Marine," "The Limbless Hunter," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGE BRIG.

THE United States frigate Columbia, of fifty guns, lay becalmed in the Coral Sea, about ten leagues to the westward of the New Hebrides Islands.

She was a Boston vessel, ranking first-rate of her class, and carried a crew of five hundred men.

At the time we write of she was one of the Pacific squadron, and having touched at various ports, she was now bound for Auckland, New Zealand.

Her captain, Henry Marlow, was an experienced sailor, and all her lieutenants were good, trustworthy officers.

The youngest warranted officer aboard above the rank of midshipman was Tom Trueman, the sailing-master—a fine, manly youth of eighteen, much liked and respected by his shipmates.

At the early age of twelve he had, through the exertions of his father, who had been a colonel in the regular army, obtained a midshipman's warrant, and left his parents to follow the life of a sailor.

Devoted to his calling, and excelling all his brother "mids" in acquiring a knowledge of nautical affairs, he was soon passed—that is to say, he was ranked as passed midshipman.

At sixteen, for general good conduct, he was made master's mate, and finally a noble, daring deed on his part led to his being promoted to sailing-master. The praiseworthy act alluded to was his saving the life of little Jack, the nephew of Commodore Smith, of the frigate Warrior, aboard of which Trueman was then master's mate.

The boy, a midshipman, fell into the sea during a heavy gale of wind, and knowing the youngster could not swim, Tom plunged overboard and held him until a cutter, with great difficulty in such a tempest, arrived from the ship and picked up the twain, with Trueman nearly in the last stage of exhaustion. A few months after his promotion to sailing-master, the Warrior having reached Boston, and her crew having been discharged, Tom went away aboard the Columbia, little dreaming of the singular adventures he was destined to encounter during this voyage.

It was just a year after leaving her home-port when the Columbia lay becalmed as already stated in the Coral Sea.

Far in the distance before the breeze died away the crew had seen a brig whose singular yawning motions puzzled them all.

It was evident that her wheel was deserted.

Not a soul could be detected about her decks.

Her rigging severed here and there was in confusion, and a torn signal flag hung over her taff-rail.

Captain Marlow longed for a breeze to waft his frigate to the mysterious vessel.

At last a puff of air rippled the sea.

"Main-top, there?" hailed Tom Trueman, who had the watch.

"Ay, ay, sir!" bawled the captain of the top.

"Which way have you the wind aloft?"

"Lightly from the south and east, sir?"

"Now hail the midshipman at the main, Mr. Trueman, and ask him what he sees," said Captain Marlow.

Through his trumpet Tom roared:

"Aloft there, Mr. Trumble, what do you see?"

The piping voice of the little midshipman, thus questioned, came shrilly down from the to'gallant crosstrees.

"There are people lying upon her deck, sir."

"Square the yards!" cried the captain, as the breeze freshened.

As Tom repeated the order, the after guard and other nimble fellows sprang to the braces.

The catheads, the booms and the rigging, were soon alive with men, all gazing toward the strange vessel the ship was approaching.

When near enough the spectators beheld a scene that thrilled them with horror.

The persons visible on the brig's deck were apparently dead!

Gashed and cut about their bodies they lay in various positions.

"Luff there! luff you can!" ordered the frigate's captain.

"Luff it is, sir," answered the grisly old quartermaster by the wheel.

"Down with the first cutter!" was the next order as the ship swung up into the wind.

A midshipman skipped forward to carry the last command to the boatswain, whose pipe was then heard shrilling through the ship to be followed by the hoarse voice of his mate.

"Away there, first cutters, away!"

The boat was lowered and into her tumbled her crew.

The captain chose to head the boat on this occasion, accompanied only by his sailing-master, Tom Trueman.

As the Columbia's main yard had been hauled aback, she lay within hailing distance of the brig when the captain boarded the latter craft.

Tom followed him to the deck.

There were, as stated, about twelve dead men in all lying there.

The cabin and forecabin were found to be deserted, but in the former some articles of female apparel were discovered.

"How strange," said the frigate's captain, as he looked about him. "In my opinion there has been mutiny. What do you think, Mr. Trueman?"

"There certainly has been foul play, sir," answered Tom. "But, if I may be allowed to differ from you, I do not think there has been a mutiny."

"Speak out, sir. Let me hear your opinion," said the captain.

Tom, with a shudder, pointed toward an object wedged between two broken spars on the lee side of the quarter deck.

The captain had not previously noticed it, as it lay behind a confused heap of canvas.

At a first glance so much did the face resemble an ape's, that it might have been thought to be an animal of that kind.

But a closer inspection would have shown the doubled-up form to be that of a man—almost a dwarf in size.

The half-naked limbs, though covered with hair, were those of a human being.

The skull had been nearly cloven by an ax or hatchet.

But the strange creature had clung to his spear to the last, and it was still in his right hand.

It was a formidable weapon, very sharp and slightly green near the point, as if tipped with poison.

"In my opinion," said Tom, the vessel was attacked by some party of ferocious islanders, and the dead man was one of the number."

"Probably you are right," replied the frigate's commander, "but I did not know there were any such beings on the islands about us."

"It is then a mystery, sir, as to where this fellow came from?"

"Yes, sir; it is. I have heard that there used to be a race of baboon-faced, dwarfish men on Manicola Island, but according to all accounts, none of them are to be found now. They were all exterminated by the Spaniards and the savages of another island."

"This is a Spanish vessel, sir," said Tom. "It looks as if some of the strange people you speak of still existed, and that they have attacked this craft from motives of revenge."

"True. The dead seamen about us are evidently Spaniards, and the vessel, which bears the name of St. Mary, is a Spanish craft. But I must confess that the ferocious race I alluded to are no more."

For some time longer the young sailing-master and his commander vainly endeavored to solve the seeming mystery.

Then the captain hailed the frigate, ordering some men to come off to remove the dead and repair the cut rigging aboard the brig.

In a short time the decks were cleared. Body after body was dropped overboard, and the man-of-war's men turned their heads with a shudder as the dead were dragged beneath the surface by swarms of ferocious sharks.

The captain returned to the frigate, leaving the young sailing-master with a party of seamen to put the brig in a condition to be taken to New Guinea.

Night settled about the vessel ere the work of repairing damages was completed.

The lights of the frigate could be seen about two miles off.

Tom headed for her, as he had been ordered to do.

The night was very dark, but he had the wind in his favor.

All at once, as Tom stood by the man at the wheel, he beheld through the cabin skylight an uncouth form like that of the dead native who had been dropped overboard with the other bodies.

The person he saw was evidently one of the same people to whom the dead man had belonged.

He had been hidden in the hold from which he had now suddenly emerged.

In one hand he held a flaming torch—a piece of a tarred stay, which he had probably lighted by the cabin lamp—in the other was his spear.

In an instant Tom comprehended his intention. A part of the vessel's cargo consisted of gunpowder, stowed in the run.

The native stooping, seized the ring of the run hatch to raise it, and the youth was thus aware that he meant to blow up the craft.

Unsheathing his sword, the young sailing-master ran down into the cabin.

But the savage had already lifted the hatch and tossed his torch among the kegs of powder.

"On deck there!" roared Tom. "Jump overboard for your lives! The brig is going to blow up!"

The hideous ape-faced man gave a snarling cry, and darted through the cabin window—a large one—which was open.

As he plunged into the sea, Tom followed him.

The human monster had raised his spear and was about to hurl it through Tom's body, when there was a hissing sound, followed by a broad flash of light and a roar as of many thunders.

Breaking into a thousand fragments the brig blew up in a stream of lurid fire that seemed to reach to the very heavens.

A bolt of iron passed through the brain of the native, and turning a somersault, he disappeared, head downward, beneath the sea.

For several moments Tom was surrounded by the flying debris of the shattered craft.

But fortunately he remained untouched.

All the men aboard except one, whose foot had caught in a ring-bolt, had escaped death by the sailing-master's timely order to them to jump overboard.

They were good swimmers, and a cutter, with a lieutenant from the frigate, finally picked them up.

Tom described to the lieutenant how the native had accomplished his disastrous work.

"Well, there's an end to him and to the brig also," said the officer. "Now, then, it is pretty sure that we'll never learn where those strange people came from."

At that moment a faint cry was heard from the sea.

By the light of the boat's lantern a scorched, half-blackened face was seen above a spar, to which the owner was clinging.

This person being helped into the cutter, declared, in a scarcely audible voice, that he was Captain Carlos, and had been master and owner of the brig.

He was now in a dying condition, but he lived long enough to make a few explanations.

Accompanied by his daughter Bella, of fifteen, he had sailed from Cartagena, Spain, bound for Manilla.

On the night before this one, he had been attacked by swarms of strange, dwarfish ape-faced men.

"In canoes?" asked the lieutenant.

"No, strange to say, they ran alongside of us in a fine, clipper-built schooner. They commenced at once to slaughter us and cut up our rigging. I escaped death by falling into the hold, far down among a heap of spars and sails, where I lay for some time unconscious. When I regained my senses, I thought of my daughter and spoke her name. But I was so badly hurt that my voice was very faint. That is why you did not hear me when you came aboard, though I called to you. Have you seen my child?"

"No."

"Then St. Mary help her! She has been carried off by those horrible human monsters! Promise me you will try to find and rescue her!"

"That may be impossible. We have no clew," said the lieutenant. "Besides, she may not be alive."

A look of such terrible agony convulsed the dying man's face, that Tom, with the warm impulse of a generous boy, cried out:

"Ay, ay, sir. I promise, if I have the chance, to look for your daughter."

The sufferer grasped his hand.

"Then I die content," he said, and a few seconds later, he breathed his last.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRE-SHIP.

THE brig's dead captain was conveyed to the frigate, and to the latter's commander Tom gave all necessary explanations.

The deceased, with weights attached to the feet to sink the body, was launched overboard.

Then Captain Marlow held a consultation with his officers, and it was resolved that an attempt should be made to discover the brig's mysterious assailants.

So long as they were not arrested and punished any merchant vessel, it would seem, was liable to be pounced upon by them, and her crew murdered.

Under easy sail the frigate was kept along, heading toward a group of islands to the north and east.

Just before dawn Tom was forward superintending the posting of the lookouts for the morning watch.

"A queer affair, sir," remarked an old sheet-anchor-man who stood near him. "D'ye think them natives was after plunder or what?"

"Both plunder and revenge," answered the young officer.

"It seems they took off the Spanish captain's darter," added the old sailor. "She must have been a fine-looking lass, if this be her picture," he added handing Tom a small likeness. "I found this after the man was launched overboard, lying on deck. It must have dropped from his pocket."

Tom examined the little portrait by the light of a lantern.

"A beautiful girl," he said, as he was about to return the likeness to the seaman.

"Keep it, sir; keep it," said the man. "Better a young gentleman like you should have it than such an old hulk as I am. You're just the sort a young girl like that would take a fancy to, you see, and as you're going to search for her, why her beauty may urge you to make great exertions to look for her, and——"

"There, Ben, that will do," interrupted the sailing-master. "Humanity, to say nothing alone of my duty as an American naval officer, would be sufficient to induce me to use every effort to find and rescue the girl."

"Well spoken, sir," replied Ben, gazing with admiration at the boy.

His neat, well-fitting uniform, his erect, muscular frame, his handsome, manly face, with its dark, spirited eyes, expressing frankness and resolution, gave him the air of a trusty, noble young seaman.

For about half an hour after posting the lookouts, he stood upon the fore-castle peering through the gloom.

The outline of an island now was seen looming up far ahead, and the boy noticed that the frigate, in spite of a good breeze, made but little way against a current which was setting toward her.

He went aft to the lieutenant of the watch.

"I would advise getting a lead over the side, sir," he said, "as we are drawing so close to the island ahead."

"Ay—ay, sir, do so," responded the lieutenant.

Tom soon had a man in the chains.

"Heave!" he shouted, and the lead was thrown.

"By—the—mark—ten!" bawled the leadsman.

Again he hove the lead and his hoarse voice quickly followed.

"And a half nine!"

"Again. Heave away that lead!"

The third throw was given, and the result was quickly reported.

"By the deep eight."

"We seem to be on the way for shoaling, sir," Tom remarked to the lieutenant.

"We will have to go in stays then," said the person addressed.

"However try the lead again, sir."

The report after the fourth throw was presently made.

"And a half seven."

The lead was now cast rapidly, and as the depth steadily decreased Tom finally received the order for staying (tacking).

The rattling of tacks and sheets with the flapping of the huge canvas was heard, and the ship was gathering way on her changed course, when the hoarse cry of the man on the lookout was heard.

"Shoal right ahead."

"What do you see?" shouted Tom, running forward.

"A sand-bank, or something of that kind, sir," was the reply.

Tom, peering through the gloom, could see a whirl of white, phosphorescent water through which showed something dark.

Whether this was a rock, or a sand bank, he could not determine.

"Port, there, port!" he cried in a ringing voice.

The order was obeyed.

But ere the frigate could answer her helm, she grazed against something which emitted a metallic sound.

Then, all at once, a dark object arose from the sea close alongside of her.

The light of the frigate's lantern falling upon it, showed it to be apparently the hull of an iron vessel.

It was about thirty feet long, shaped forward something like the head of a sword fish, with a dead-light on each side and in front of the sharp pointed bow.

The dead-lights at the side suddenly became illuminated, resembled the eyes of some fierce, terrible sea monster.

Brighter did they gleam every moment, until they looked like red-hot balls of fire.

The men of the watch aboard the frigate exchanged glances of astonishment.

Never before had they seen so strange a spectacle.

Strange and mysterious it certainly was.

The hull had risen like magic from under the surface of the sea, and there it now was, with the sharp sword-fish like bow, headed for the frigate amidships, as if to cut her in two.

Even Tom, for a moment, stood like one paralyzed.

But his was not a nature to long remain thus appalled either in the face of common or unnatural perils.

Whatever the thing was that was driving straight for the frigate it certainly was a thing to be avoided, and the young sailing-master having solicited and obtained from the lieutenant permission to maneuver the vessel, now exerted himself to keep the ship clear of it.

An unearthly buzzing noise issued from the iron hull, as it approached.

Evidently there was strange machinery at work to propel this craft, which showed neither steam pipe, mast or sail.

"Hard-a-starboard! A pull on the weather braces!" shouted the youth, through his trumpet.

As the huge vessel luffed, the iron hull went gliding past her, almost grazing her counter.

Then all at once, long tongues of fire were seen to shoot up from the decks of the singular craft.

Higher and higher they rose, now and then spreading outward like flaming serpents.

"Up helm! square yards!" shouted Tom, as the dangerous flames almost touched the frigate's shrouds.

The Columbia fell off, as the nimble tars obeyed orders, but now round came the fire ship in chase of her.

Tom advised the lieutenant to pile on everything, and soon the shrill pipe of the boatswain's mate was heard, followed by the order:

"Aloft and loosen all! Away, there, you topmen, away!"

In an instant the yards were covered with nimble forms, and under royal skysails and studdingsails fore and aft, the huge frigate, roaring like a live thing as her bows parted the water, was speeding away from that strange fire-fiend of the sea now astern of her.

So great was the speed of the fire ship that it seemed to gain on the chase.

The captain having been called, was now on deck.

Booms, bows and rigging were full of seamen and little midshipmen, all gazing curiously toward that mysterious flaming hull astern.

"We will try it with a few shot," said the captain. "It is gaining on us."

In fact the blazing craft was already perilously near the frigate.

Sam Jones, an experienced old gunner of the ship, soon had a forty-pounder on the gun-deck pointed toward the pursuing hull.

The flames from the latter seemed to shoot up to the very heavens, lighting the sea for miles. Now and then they would cross each other, or twine together like live things, emitting a loud hissing noise, as they steamed far out to the fugitive vessel.

"Fire," roared the gunner, as soon as the piece was carefully sighted.

The booming of the gun was heard, and a loud crash and clang indicated that the shot had struck the iron hull.

But it still came sweeping on.

"Again!" shouted the captain.

"Load!" roared the gunner, and in a few seconds the report of the piece a second time shook the frigate.

Though the fire-ship was struck by this shot also, its speed was not abated.

It was now so close to the frigate that the heat of the flames could be felt by the man-o'-war-men.

"We are lost if it gets afoul of us!" cried the captain. "Port there, quartermaster, and brace the yards," he added, turning to the lieutenant.

These commands were obeyed, but as the frigate changed her course the fire-ship changed hers to correspond with it.

"What can it mean?" cried the astonished captain. "Some human being must be directing the movements of that vessel, and yet how can anyone live aboard that burning craft?"

A few of the superstitious old sailors exchanged ominous glances.

"The frigate's doomed. Better take to the launch and cutters," cried one.

"Ay, ay. We don't want to stay here to be burned or roasted or blown up," said another.

It was not intended that these words should reach the captain's ears.

Nevertheless he heard them.

"Call up your men!" he said to the lieutenant of marines.

The lieutenant promptly obeyed.

He gave orders to his sergeant and corporal, and the next moment the drum began to rattle and the marines paraded.

"Now, men," cried the captain to the sailors, taking a few steps forward, "I have to tell you that the first one of you who refuses to obey orders or to incite the rest to disobedience will be shot down."

There was a dead silence for a few moments.

Then a man named Horlins—one of the most desperate characters aboard the ship, said boldly:

"You have no right to force us to remain aboard longer. We should take to the boats. I, for one, will not lay my hand on rope or brace again."

"Arrest that man!" said the captain to the master-at-arms.

But Horlins sprang into the main rigging and nimbly mounted aloft.

Several sailors were sent in pursuit of him.

One of them, ahead of the others, soon was close to the fugitive, who now was out at the end of the top-gallant yard.

Suddenly Horlins, who was possessed of wonderful strength, caught his pursuer—a mere boy—by the throat, and despite his struggles, tied him with the gasket (a rope used for winding around the sail when furled) to the yard.

Then, with an exulting shout, the man sprang from the end of the yard into the sea.

At the same moment a lurid tongue of fire streamed from the blazing craft, which was now close to the frigate, upon the unfortunate youth tied to the yard.

The boy gave a scream of agony. He twisted and withed in a vain effort to escape the scorching flame.

The most horrible cries issued from his lips.

Bent nearly double in his agony, he was seen to turn as black as a cinder.

Suddenly his form curving inward like that of some tortured wasp, his head drooped sideways.

Then, as his lashings were burned through, he fell into the sea, his smoking clothes, which had caught fire, making a hissing sound as he sank.

The ship taking the flames upon her yards, seemed about to become ignited.

"We are lost," said the captain. "Nothing now can help the frigate."

But Tom, the young sailing-master, came up to him, touching his cap.

"If you leave it to me, sir, I think I can save the ship," cried the youth, his handsome face aglow with manly confidence.

CHAPTER III.

A DARING DEED.

THE captain looked at Tom as he spoke.

He had always liked the youth, so true to his duty.

"Quick, then, if you can think of any way," he said.

"The only way is to anchor that craft. I will try to do it."

"And lose your life in the attempt."

"I am ready to risk my life any time, when necessary," answered Tom.

"Go on, then, and God help you," said the captain.

Tom gave instant orders to the fore-castle men to stand by to cut away the frigate's large anchor—the right bower.

Then he had a hawser bent on to it, and having ordered the cutter to be lowered, was soon in it with the end of the rope.

His intention was to take the rope aboard the fire-ship, and there make it fast.

Fortunately, a slight change of wind was now sending the flames a little away from the war vessel.

Tom hoped this would continue until he had time enough to accomplish his intention.

His men worked the oars with a will, and in less than a minute he was astern of the blazing hull.

But no dangling rope was there to enable him to clamber aboard.

Meanwhile so great was the heat that he could scarcely breathe.

Both he and his crew suffered intensely.

Were not the flames being blown forward the seamen would have been obliged to back away from their trying position.

But nothing daunted, Tom, with a coil of the hawser over his shoulder, caught his boat hook in a hole just under the top of the iron rail

and by means of the pole clambered aboard the hull, which did not rise more than eight feet above the surface of the sea.

The moment he got aboard he was lost to the view of the men in the cutter.

But it was evident that the hawser was fastened, for the fore-castle men seeing him make, as they supposed, a signal with his upraised arm, let go the anchor from the frigate and the fire-ship was found to be anchored.

The Columbia, forging further from the blazing hull, was soon many fathoms from it.

Her main yard now was again hauled aback, and the captain awaited the return of the sailing-master.

But Tom did not appear in sight even of his shipmates aboard the cutter.

His crew called him in vain.

There was no response.

The wind soon changing, the heat of the flames now coming their way, drove them from their position.

"We must save him!" cried the coxswain, who like most all the sailors, was much devoted to Tom.

A slight shifting of the fire enabled him to make a dash toward the iron hull.

But at that moment the fire ship, to the astonishment of all the spectators, suddenly vanished from their sight.

Down it went into the sea, disappearing in a cloud of steam caused by the contact of the flames with the water.

It sank as suddenly and mysteriously as it had risen.

"Great God?" cried Captain Marlow as he looked toward the clouds of vapor, "the craft has sunk and with her, Mr. Trueman, our brave sailing-master!"

"My belief is that he perished a moment after he boarded her—that he dropped overcome by the heat," said the lieutenant.

"Noble boy, he died to save us!" cried the captain.

"After all, how know we that he is dead, sir?" remarked the lieutenant.

The captain stared at the speaker.

"How could he live, sir, under water, even if he did not perish ere the vessel sank?"

"He may have risen to the surface after the craft went down, sir."

"Then he would be scalded to death by the steam."

"Might not he have risen away from its influence, sir?"

"I think not. But there's the cutter pulling about now," added the captain, pointing out that boat's lantern through the gloom.

Half an hour later the cutter came alongside.

Many an anxious glance was cast toward her by the watch aboard the frigate.

Then there was a cry of disappointment.

Tom, the gallant young sailing-master, was not there.

"I think he must be lost, sir," said the coxswain, as he saluted the captain on boarding the ship.

"Alas, how could it be otherwise?" the captain sadly answered.

The frigate lay "off and on" the spot where the fire-ship had disappeared, but although it was now dawn, and the sea was carefully searched, the sailing-master's body was not found.

All at once, however, on a reef near an island, not a league distant, a human form was descried.

The ship was headed that way, but the little midshipmen who were aloft with their glasses, finally announced that the person seen was not Mr. Trueman. It was Horlin, who, after jumping from the frigate, must have swam to that place. A cutter, with corporals and marines, was sent to the reef, but Horlin now could not be found.

His hat and necktie were seen floating in the midst of a swarm of sharks, and it was thought that he had become the victim of these monsters.

The boat returned to the frigate, which was put upon her former course, by a saddened crew, for there was not a man aboard who did not mourn the loss of Tom Trueman.

Most of the men believed that he had been overcome by the heat, ere the fire-ship went down.

They were right in their conjecture.

On boarding the iron hull, Tom had just time to secure the hawser to a ringbolt on the deck, when he found the heat insupportable and fell.

After that he knew no more until he came to his senses, to discover

that he was lying on a sandy beach, near the mouth of a cavern by the sea.

He staggered to his feet, and some moments passed ere he could recall his scattered recollections. Then he remembered his boarding the fire-ship, and was puzzled to account for his being in this place.

He looked about him, and perceived that he was on an island with a reef not far off, extending parallel with the beach.

In the distance he could see a ship, and his keen gaze soon assured him that this was the frigate.

He left the cave, intending to ascend a rock, and with his kerchief, signal the vessel.

But as he was about to climb the rugged elevation, the form of a young man emerged from behind it.

"Horlins!" cried Tom.

"Ay, ay, sir. Here I am."

"How came you here?"

"I swam to this place after dropping overboard."

"You will return with me to the frigate?"

"Will I? I don't think I will, sir."

"You must. I insist upon it."

"How are we going to get there?"

"They will send a boat for us after I signal the ship."

"You'll not signal the ship."

"Not signal her?"

"No. I'll not permit it."

Horlins pulled his sheath-knife from his belt as he spoke.

Tom instinctively felt for his sword, but he suddenly remembered that he had found himself deprived of this—his only weapon—when he came to his senses.

"See here," said Horlins. "I'm going to have things my own way now, or it will be the worse for you."

He was a tall, powerful fellow and Tom was somewhat weakened by his late mishap.

Nevertheless, prompt and resolute at all times, he was determined to do his duty.

"Put down that knife," he said.

Horlins laughed defiantly.

"You're not aboard the ship," he said. "You'll find I'm the one to give orders now."

As he spoke he rushed toward the young officer with eyes gleaming like a tiger's.

Tom had noticed a small bowlder lying near him.

He picked it up and hurled it at his assailant.

As the latter held up his arms to shield his head the piece of rock struck them, and his knife flew from his benumbed hand into the sea.

In a moment Tom had closed with him and the two fell upon the sand.

Horlins struggled fiercely.

The injury his arm had suffered gave his opponent the advantage.

The youth soon had him under him, with both knees upon his breast and a hand upon his throat.

"Now, Horlins, promise to obey my orders, or I will have to kill you. Under the circumstances it is my duty!"

"I promise," sullenly gasped the half-choked desperado.

"Get up, then," said Tom, as he let go of the man and sprang to his feet.

At that moment he received a blow on the head from behind and fell senseless.

A dwarfish man with a hideous, ape-like face, had sprang from behind a rock and dealt him the blow with the butt of a spear. This person had a similar appearance to that of the dead man aboard the Spanish vessel.

Horlins, who had arisen, started back as the savage pointed his spear toward him.

"Hold! What would you do?" he said. "I am no friend to this naval officer, or to any of the people aboard the frigate!"

An ugly leer distorted the hairy visage of the islander.

"Why no friend?" he said.

"Because I have been what's called a 'prison bird,' and my ship-mates and the officers, all knowing it, have treated me badly from the first."

"Want revenge?"

"Ay, that's what I would like," cried Horlins, fiercely. "Twice

have I been tied up in the rigging of that frigate and flogged. I would like to pay off my grudge."

"Good," said the islander. "Perhaps you be made one of us."

"Who do you mean by us?"

"Know by and by. Come with me."

"But you haven't killed him yet," said Horlins, pointing to the prostrate form of the young officer.

"Thurline would have it so. She said not to kill."

"Who is Thurline?"

"By and by you know. But first you must not see. You must be as a blind man before Hookah lead you to our chief."

So saying the islander took off the sailor's kerchief, and tied it tightly over his eyes. Then grasping his hand he led him onward.

Not long after, Tom regained his senses, and arose.

His head, bruised by the blow he had received, was painful and dizzy.

He bathed it in the sea, however, and felt much relieved.

He could still see the frigate in the distance, and again he was about to try to signal her when a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder.

Then Tom beheld at his side a middle-aged man with fierce eyes and a stern, heavily-bearded visage.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEETING.

THE person upon whom the young officer now gazed had something the appearance of a pirate.

He wore a skull cap, a jacket open in front, ornamented with bright buttons, and loose flowing trousers, the latter confined about the waist with a broad belt, in which were thrust a pistol and a sword.

"Who are you?" inquired Tom.

"I am Captain Rulok, of the fire-ship."

"Of the fire-ship?"

"Yes, and I had you at my mercy in the hold of my vessel not long since. There I conveyed you after you fell, overpowered by the heat, aboard the craft. I would have killed you for balking me by anchoring my vessel had not it been for my adopted daughter, Thurline."

"I did my duty. But tell me," added the youth, whose curiosity was now aroused, "how you contrive to exist in and to navigate a burning ship?"

The other smiled.

"It is simple enough. You have proved yourself an expert and gallant seaman. Join me and my wild band and your life shall be spared."

"No, I may as well tell you, first as last, that I will never join any such band."

"You prefer, then, to suffer death?" said the man, drawing a pistol from his belt, and cocking it. "You have learned too much about my affairs to live."

"I have learned that you are a sort of pirate, commanding a fire-ship—that you attack and plunder vessels, besides varying the pastime by now and then burning such craft as try to interfere with your lawless proceedings."

"You are partly right, but it is the Spaniards—the persecutors of my unfortunate race—whom I usually attack and kill."

"Surely you are not of the race of the ape-like islanders."

"I am of their race, on my mother's side, but my father was a Scotchman who married one of their best looking women. He was a castaway, who, adrift in a boat, came to this island. Ere long, hidden in caves and holes among the mountains, he discovered what remained of the ape-faced people, who had been thought to be extinct. The Spanish residents of the island, which they had named Manicola, believed they had killed all these people, but they were mistaken. Under leadership of my father, who, after his marriage espoused their cause, they surprised the Spaniards here, and dispatched every one of them with knives and spears. When I was old enough to leave them, my father sent me to an English ship-builder, at New Guinea, to learn the trade. The builder said that I had genius. Finally, after I had saved money, I planned the fire-ship you have seen. My employer, as soon as I had constructed the ship, at my expense, tried to rob me of my plans, so that he could secure a patent for his own benefit. Determined to keep my secret, I killed him, and came back to this island. During my absence my mother and father had been

stabbed to death by the boat's crew of a Spanish vessel, and this roused anew within me the desire I had long entertained of avenging my persecuted people."

"But why do you try to burn American ships?"

"I only do so when they interfere with me, as was the case with your frigate, and I will yet burn and blow her up, unless she goes off without trying to molest me further. Now, then, you have heard all I am willing to tell you," the speaker added, "and if you have anything to say to me ere I shoot you down you can do so."

"I have nothing particular to say, but I have something to do," answered the boy, as with a sudden movement he pushed the man off the rock.

Falling upon the sand, he was not much hurt, but hearing approaching footsteps, Tom thought his best plan, unarmed as he was, would be to conceal himself until he should have a chance to signal his ship, which was now hidden by a mist.

He sprang from the elevation, which was about ten feet high, on the side opposite the one on which the man had fallen, and seeing a hollow in a rock, he crept into it.

As he did so a boulder, evidently moved by some person above, came rattling down over the opening, thus closing it.

Who had moved the boulder so as to thus shut him in?

He could soon hear the captain of the fire-ship running about, with angry exclamations, as he looked in vain for him.

At last he no longer heard him and judged that he had left the place.

The boulder now was moved aside and Tom's gaze fell upon a female face at the opening.

He emerged from the hollow and beheld a young girl before him.

She was slender and of small stature, but very womanly in appearance.

Her regular features were full of expression, and lighted by a pair of large, dark eyes, which, contrasting with her long, drooping brown hair, added to her beauty.

She wore a silk robe, confined about the waist with a sash, in which were thrust a dirk and a pistol.

"I am glad you have awakened," she said, in a clear musical voice.

Then noticing his surprise, she added:

"My name is Thurline. I am a Malay girl—the adopted daughter of Captain Rulok of the fire-ship. My parents who had come to this island, died when I was seven years old. Then Captain Rulok, who was friendly to them, took care of me and taught me to read and speak English. Now those wild ape-faced people have made me their queen."

"It was you, probably, who saved my life while I was senseless aboard the fire-ship?" said Tom.

"Yes. My father would have killed you had not I interfered. I told him that if he spared your life, you might be persuaded to join us. He conveyed you to a cave on this island, intending to leave you there, watched by one of his party—one of the ape-faced men—until you should recover. The breeze soon brought you to, after which the watcher, exceeding his instructions, knocked you again senseless with the butt of his lance. He then went away and told my father, who repaired to this place to try and induce you to join our band. Your refusal would, as you know, have cost you your life, had not you pushed him off the rock. I saw you do this from a short distance, and it was I who rolled the boulder down over the mouth of this cave after you crept into it."

"I thank you for saving my life," said Tom "and will be still more thankful if you can furnish me with a canoe to enable me to get to my ship."

"Your ship is far from here," answered Thurline.

"I think I could find her."

"No, there is now a mist upon the water, you would be lost. But come with me, I will take you where I know of a good place of concealment, there you shall have food and rest."

Tom followed his guide.

She conducted him to a part of the beach where lay a small hut.

The thick mist which now had gathered would have concealed the two from the view of any person in their vicinity.

"This is the first place in which my enemies would look for me," said the youth.

"Oh, no, for it is my home—sacred to me alone, the queen of the island people here. None of them, not even my father, ever enters. Go in," she added, opening the door. "I must leave you for the

present. You will find food on a table, and you can rest on a mat which is also in the room."

The young officer entered the hut, which was neatly though plainly furnished.

On the table which Thurline had alluded to he saw some delicious bread-fruit, besides other simple refreshments of which he partook.

Then, feeling weak and drowsy after so many trying adventures, he lay down on the mat and fell asleep.

Not long after he had closed his eyes a man emerged from a clump of shrubbery on one side of the little dwelling.

It was Horlins, who, having looked carefully round him to make sure he was not observed, stole to one of the windows of the hut and peered into it.

"Asleep! It is well. He shall never awake in this world," muttered the sailor. "I have joined this band of wild people, and their chief has given me a canoe, in which I am to cruise about as a spy on the lookout for sails. Lucky it was that I saw that girl whom the islanders call their queen conduct Mr Trueman to this hut, as it will give me a chance to pay him off for the way he treated me on the beach. He shall not live to ever lord it over me again. I hate every officer aboard the frigate, and would willingly kill each one if I had the chance."

From a water-proof safe in his pocket he took a match, with which he set fire to the hut.

The light, dry wood burned rapidly, and Tom, awakened by the glare and smoke, sprang up, to find himself nearly surrounded by flames.

With all his strength he threw himself against the thin woodwork in front of him.

It gave way, and he dashed out into the open air.

He heard wild voices which seemed to draw nearer.

Evidently a party of natives had noticed the gleam of the fire and were approaching.

Tom hurried on, when he was suddenly confronted by Horlin near the edge of a cave, which he had been about to enter.

The ruffian aimed a fierce blow at his heart with his knife, but the young officer avoided it, and knocking his assailant senseless with his fist, he sprang into the cave.

He fell almost head first, for the floor of the cavern had a sharp descent.

It was of smooth rock, and he found himself rolling rapidly downward.

Vainly did he endeavor to check his course; there was nothing to afford him a hold.

At last, after a long descent, his further progress was stopped, for he had now reached the bottom of this cave or pit.

Dizzy and half stunned, he didn't fully recover himself until some minutes had passed.

Then he rose to his feet and looked about him.

The little light reaching him afforded him a dim view of the retreat. He was in a damp passage, the ground of which was of sand, strewn with shells. Its appearance denoted that at times the place was flooded.

Probably the sea-water poured into the retreat through the opening above at high tide.

Realizing his peril, he looked at the rocky floor down which he had rolled, but perceived at once that it was too steep and slippery to ascend.

Hoping to find some way of egress he moved onward.

The place grew darker as he advanced.

It seemed to him as if there was no end to the passage.

Suddenly he beheld a light.

It was a lantern held by some person who was advancing.

Tom was surprised to discover that this person was a female.

As she drew nearer he noticed that she was very young, evidently not more than fifteen.

She was of dark complexion, with long raven hair falling over her shoulders, and large black eyes full of vivacity and expression. In fact, she was a beautiful girl.

CHAPTER V.

A PRISONER.

On seeing Tom the girl paused, and uttered a cry of fear.

But the next moment, as she noticed his uniform, a look of relief animated her lovely face.

"I am surprised to meet any one in this place," said Tom, lifting his cap.

"Who are you? How came you here?" inquired the girl.

The youth explained, and the girl then said:

"You are in peril and so am I. I came here to escape Thurline, who has made me her slave, and who treats me very harshly."

Tom soon learned that this girl, as he had suspected from her resemblance to the miniature portrait old Ben had given him, was Bella Carlos, the daughter of the Spanish captain, whose vessel had been attacked by the islanders.

"I promised your father that I would look for you," he said, after he had described his meeting with her parent, "and that I would try to rescue you."

Tears flowed from Bella's eyes when she heard of her father's death.

"He is gone. I am an orphan now," she sobbed.

"I will save you, if possible, and take you aboard the frigate," said Tom, gently.

"You are very kind, sir, but I fear you will find it a hard task to rescue me."

"Surely there must be some way to get out of this place, since I find you here," said the young officer.

"There is a way, but it is so near the cavern rendezvous of those horrible islanders that I fear we will be seen if we try to leave it."

"Why did you enter this place?"

"Because I wanted to get away from Thurline."

"You run a great risk here, do you not?"

"Yes, it will not be long before the place will be flooded with the sea-water."

"And you would have drowned yourself?"

"Sooner than remain with Thurline, who has treated me very harshly, I would risk death. But I meant to try and leave the place unobserved, before the water entered."

"Come, then, if you will show me the way, I will endeavor to conduct you safely from here."

Then, taking the miniature from his pocket, Tom presented it to the girl, telling her how it came to be in his possession.

She blushed a little as she received it, and a moment later she moved on ahead of the youth.

Finally the latter noticed the floor of the passage had on upward slope.

As the two hurried on the sound of many voices was heard beyond. Suddenly Bella pointed to an opening high above their heads on the right side of the passage.

"There they are," she said.

Tom looked to see a number of ape-faced men collected in a large, rocky apartment, in which were rude chairs and tables.

In front of them, on a bench, stood their chief, addressing them.

He was the same piratical-looking person who had appeared before Tom on the beach.

"I see him—the captain of the fire-ship," remarked the youth to his companion.

"I have heard Thurline speak of that strange ship," answered Bella.

"It is a mystery to me how they can navigate it while it is burning."

"Ay, and as I have told you, I was aboard that vessel while she was under water, but unfortunately, being senseless at the time, I could make no observations."

Bella hurried on.

Suddenly she paused.

"The entrance to this place is ahead only a few yards further. Generally a couple of the islanders, armed with spears, are posted near it on guard, as the opening leading to their retreat is close by it."

As Bella thus spoke Tom moved quickly forward and soon found himself near the entrance.

Just then a large rock was dropped over this entrance.

The youth returned to the girl and told her what had happened.

"We are doomed!" she said. "The natives have probably been informed ere now of your being here by that traitor, Horlins, and have closed the passage to insure your death!"

Brave as he was Tom's heart sank.

"Hark!" said Bella. "The water is coming in now."

In fact a gurgling, roaring noise was heard not far off.

Soon the white foam of the incoming water could be seen through the gloom.

On came the rising water, mounting higher and higher, until it washed over the feet of the twain.

"God help us!" said Bella.

The water rose still higher.

Presently it was up to the girl's waist.

"Perhaps it will recede before it can drown us," said Tom, hopefully.

"Oh, no; it will rise nearly to the opening above us, not until then will it begin to recede, passing off through some secret outlet, which it seems is unknown."

At length the water was up to Bella's neck.

Tom then lifted her to a rugged shelf on one side of the passage.

At the same moment he heard an angry voice:

"Hah! so my slave and the young officer have met!"

He looked up, to see Thurline standing on the edge of the opening, which had been alluded to as affording a view of the islander's cave.

The little queen's eyes flashed fiercely.

"Save that girl!" cried Tom. "Surely you will not leave her to perish!"

"I will save you, but she shall die." Was the answer.

Turning, she shouted to one of the ape-faced men to bring a rope.

She was obeyed, and fastening the rope to a rocky spur, she lowered it.

"Take hold and climb," she called to the sailing-master!

"Not unless you consent to save this young lady, too!" cried Tom.

"I tell you she must die!" said Thurline, stamping with one of her little feet.

The youth mounting to the rocky shelf, fastened the rope about Bella's waist.

"Now haul!" he cried, as he seized the line.

Thurline ordered some of her men to pull on the rope.

The moment Tom had reached the opening, however, he only was drawn in off the line.

"Now down to your death, slave of a Spanish girl!" cried Thurline, as she made a sign to her men to let go the line.

Bella was thus dropped back into the water.

Then, to his dismay, Tom was seized and led rapidly away from the spot into the cavern beyond, leaving behind him the gurgling cries of the girl whom he had been forced to desert.

The captain of the fire-ship confronted the youth.

"You are now in my power," he said. "Either consent to join us or die."

"He will consent to remain with us," said Thurline softly, as she smiled upon the youth.

No fabled syren of the sea could have given the young sailor a more bewitching glance, but he was not at all influenced by it.

"I answered you once," he said to the captain, "and my answer must still be the same."

The captain made a sign to his wild men, at least half a dozen spears were pointed at the breast of the boy.

But Thurline threw herself in front of these deadly weapons.

"If you kill him, you kill your daughter, too!" she cried.

"Fool! you love this boy!" cried her father.

"Thurline does not give her love unsought," she answered. "But you know the law of our race."

"Be it so," answered her father. "But if you win him not in seven days, he must die."

Tom felt ill at ease.

He now knew that Thurline wanted to win him for her husband, and the thought was very distasteful to him, although, from what he had heard, he inferred that if he made the girl his wife his life would be spared.

He was conducted to a small rocky apartment opening from the main one, and there refreshments were brought to him.

But the thought of the Spanish girl, Bella's fate preyed upon his mind.

He tasted no food, but he drank a little water, which, it seemed to him, had a singular taste.

A few minutes later a strange feeling came over him.

He dropped upon a mat and sank into a sort of stupor.

When his senses returned to him he found himself in a larger cave.

He was upon a sort of rude lounge, and several lovely forms were flitting before him.

They were young girl attired in long robes, with wreaths of leaves and flowers about their brows.

Near him, looking down upon him, stood Thurline, wearing a beautiful robe, with a ring of pearls about her throat, and a starry gem upon her forehead adding to the almost unearthly beauty of her face.

To Tom's surprise, he now became aware of a sensation which made him no longer averse to this strange island queen.

"I would not doom the Spanish girl, Bella, to death for your sake," she said, in a sweet voice. "Here she is, one of my favored slaves. I had her drawn up from the water after you were led away from the cave opening."

There, in fact, was Bella, neatly attired, but looking very sad.

"She shall be one of those to witness our marriage," continued Thurline, with a triumphant glance at the fair captive.

"I don't want to marry you," cried Tom, rather bluntly.

"Don't you?" said Thurline, softly, and as she spoke she gave him a glance which had a singular effect on the young sailor.

Obedying an impulse he could not resist, he arose and took her hand.

His brain seemed to be in sort of a whirlpool of confusion.

"Am I bewitched?" was the question he asked himself.

An old man with a long white beard came forward.

"I am a chaplain—was wrecked off this island on a French brig-of-war, and joined these people, as I hate the Spaniards. In fact there are more than a half a dozen white men belonging to this island band. I am now here to marry you to Thurline, the queen of the islanders. Are you willing to make her your wife?"

Tom would have said "no," but some strange feeling seem to destroy his will power, and he answered "yes!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE WORK OF THE FIRE-SHIP.

A BRIGHT smile lighted the visage of the little queen.

She drew closer to Tom, and the chaplain was proceeding to make them man and wife, when suddenly a volley of musketry was heard thundering close to the cave.

It was followed by shouts, above which could be heard the deep voice of the captain of the fire-ship.

"Give it to them. Kill and sink every Spaniard into the sea!"

The tramp of many feet was heard.

Suddenly into the cave rushed a dozen Spaniard marines, armed with muskets and headed by an officer holding a drawn sword.

Thurline pulled her pistol from her girdle and shot the officer dead.

Behind the marines appeared a large party of the ape-faced men led by their chief.

Evidently the Spaniards had come ashore from some craft off the island and had been attacked unawares, for they were retreating in confusion from their assailants.

Either it was this spectacle which restored Tom's mind to its natural state, or else the mysterious influence which had been operating upon him had had time to wear off.

Certain it is that he now acted with his usual prompt resolution.

Springing to the side of the fallen man, he caught up his sword and at once took sides with the Spaniards.

"Show a bold front, men!" he shouted. "Follow me and we will at least make it hard for them to vanquish us."

Encouraged by his voice, the marines close behind him made a dash toward their enemies, who outnumbered them two to one.

A sharp conflict followed.

The ape-faced men fought with great fury, and several of their opponents fell.

Sword in hand the captain of the fire-ship met the young sailing-master, and their weapons crossed.

"You are not yet Thurline's husband, and you shall die," he cried, as he made a thrust at the boy.

But the latter parried the blow, and he was about putting his sword through the captain's body, when Thurline sprang between the two and clung to her father.

Thus turned from this opponent, Tom attacked one of the islanders who was about thrusting his spear through the body of a wounded Spaniard.

The young officer's sword, brought down across the native's neck, almost severed his head from his body.

But now only four of the Spaniards remained, and these, taking to their heels, made for their boat, which lay not far from the entrance of the cave.

Tom, with his face to the foe, backed toward the boat.

Spear after spear was hurled at him, but the trunks of some coconut trees saved him, the weapons striking them and glancing off.

He was now close to the boat, and sprang into it, as the men seized their oars.

The mist still lay thick upon the water, and it soon hid the boat from the gaze of the natives who had continued to hurl after it their spears, which, however, had been dodged by the rowers.

"This has been a bad business for you," Tom remarked, as the boat glided on.

"Yes," answered one of the men. "We belong to the Barcelona, an armed brig, lying about a league from here, and we were sent ashore, with four sailors to row us, to look for fresh water, of which we are in need. While looking for it we were suddenly attacked. The sailors who were with us were killed at once. We fired a volley at the natives and shot several, then retreated, as you saw, into the cave."

"I am sorry you did not rescue one of your countrywomen there," said Tom, and he explained about Bella—the Spanish captive maiden.

"Oh, we will have her safe among us before long," was the answer. "Our captain, when we tell him, will bring his guns to bear upon the island, and force the rascals to give her up."

The boat sped onward, and Tom was hoping he would at last find a chance to reach his frigate, when one of those sudden squalls, common to this region, pounced upon the sea.

The wind, blowing with terrific fury, sent the spray flying in clouds about the boat.

It would have been swamped but for the young sailing-master.

He seized the tiller, and by great exertion contrived to keep the boat's head to the sea, while he directed one of the marines to bail out the water.

The squall was succeeded by a gale with a heavy sea, which lasted for hours.

When night came, there was the boat tossing wildly about in the darkness.

At dawn the violence of the gale had abated, and the mist and rock had cleared.

Tom looked in vain for the frigate.

But there was a vessel far ahead which he soon made out to be a brig.

"That must be your craft," he said to his companions.

"Yes, sir, it is—I am sure of it," was the answer.

The brig lay about two leagues from the island, and now evidently her people saw the boat, for a signal was run up and a gun fired.

Steered by Tom, with the marines rather awkwardly working the oars, the boat approached the brig.

It was within about a mile of it, when, all at once, Tom became aware of a sort of humming noise from the water close to the boat.

Then, looking into the depths, he uttered an exclamation, and pointed down beneath the sea.

There the amazed Spaniards beheld about four fathoms beneath the surface a ship's iron hull, shaped like a huge fish, darting swiftly along.

"Santa Maria! what is that?" cried one of the marines.

"If I mistake not, it is that strange fire-ship I have been telling you about," answered Tom, "going to destroy your craft."

The Spaniards sprang up, gesticulating and shouting, in vain efforts to apprise the crew of the brig of their danger.

At that distance the sailors aboard the brig could not understand the meaning of their maneuvers.

Unconscious of danger, they remained with their head yards aback, lying to.

About a quarter of a hour had passed, when up from the sea, close alongside the brig, rose the iron hull, and in a few seconds huge columns of flame were rising from her decks. These flames, blown toward the craft, set her on fire in a moment.

The shouts of the officers and men and the creaking of the ropes could be heard by the occupants of the boat.

So rapid was the progress of the fire that, in a few minutes, the brig was completely wrapped in flames.

Hissing, crackling and roaring, they rose high in the air.

The vessel was now one great sheet of fire.

"They have only that boat, besides this," said one of Tom's companions, as a boat full of sailors was seen to put off from the brig.

Scarcely had it done so when, the flames having now reached the magazine, the brig blew up.

As the fragments of the wreck, after flying upward, fell back into the water, the boat's crew were seen pulling with might and main.

But not far had they gone when the fire-ship, like some fabled flaming monster, bore straight down for them.

"They are lost!" simultaneously shouted Tom's companions.

Then the fire-ship, humming and roaring, was seen to strike the boat, shattering it to many fragments.

As it thus flew to pieces, one wild cry of agony went up, but when the blazing craft had passed on, no sign of the boat's crew was to be seen.

All had been killed and found a watery grave under the deadly keel of that terrible vessel.

"Santa Maria, help us! she is coming this way!" cried one of the spectators.

In fact, Tom now perceived that the fire-ship was heading toward the boat he occupied.

On she came, the flames now spreading out on each side of her like two great flashing wings.

"We will escape her," said Tom, who with keen gaze had noticed a heavy fog-bank drifting down toward the boat.

The fog enveloped the light craft while the fire-ship was not yet a mile off.

The roar of the vessel's bows and the lurid gleam of her flames was seen some minutes later close to the boat.

Tom kept the boat away from it, and finally the fire-ship disappeared.

"I hope to sight my frigate before many hours," said the youth.

All that day the boy remained upon the sea.

Toward night it partly cleared.

The occupants of the boat were both hungry and thirsty.

At dark a light was seen in the distance.

"If I mistake not that is the frigate's light," said Tom.

He headed the boat towards it.

But at once the light vanished.

Half an hour later the outline of an approaching canoe was seen through the gloom.

Then the flash of a torch in it showed the forms and faces of the ape-faced men who paddled the vessel.

This torch was evidently the light which Tom had seen, and which, showing through the slight mist, had resembled one of the frigate's lanterns.

"We are lost!" cried one of the Spaniards, as the paddlers set up an exulting yell.

Tom sprang forward and looked at a swivel in the bow of the boat.

"Is it loaded?" he inquired.

"Yes," was the reply. "But it is damaged, and may burst."

"We will risk that," said Tom.

He aimed the little gun carefully at the canoe and fired.

There was a crash as the bow of the canoe was shattered, and as there was ammunition in the boat, Tom quickly reloaded the piece.

The islanders were seen in the water clinging to the broken craft.

"Now, then, we will pay them for killing so many of our comrades," said one of the marines.

"Yes, yes," eagerly cried his shipmates.

"Better not meddle with them," advised Tom. "There are many of them, and they might get aboard of us."

But the Spaniards, disregarding his advice, suddenly worked the boat close alongside of the struggling natives, and struck at them with their muskets.

Three of them thus killed sank beneath the surface.

Many of the others contrived to get aboard the boat.

"Now give it to them!" cried Horlins, who was with the natives.

The latter had lost their spears, but they still had their long knives.

They rushed upon the five occupants of the boat, and a desperate combat ensued.

The marines fought bravely, but the four were soon stabbed to death by their adversaries.

Tom alone remained uninjured.

He had used his sword with such effect that he had slain three of his assailants.

These had fallen over each other on a thwart of the boat in front of him, their bodies forming a sort of barricade, behind which he still stood, wielding his deadly weapon.

"Yield!" cried Horlins, "and we will spare your life!"

"Not while I can handle this good sword will I yield!" answered Tom.

CHAPTER VII.

CORNERED.

With his sword the young sailing-master still kept his opponents at bay.

But his exertions were beginning to tell upon him.

He knew that he must eventually be slain or captured unless he could think of some way to rid himself of the numbers opposed to him.

All at once he thought of the swivel.

This he had been unable to make use of while the Spaniards were fighting with the natives, lest the shot should strike one of his own party.

Now, however, he resolved to fire the gun and again run the risk of its bursting.

Suddenly pushing aside the bodies of the islanders in front of him, he "slew" the little gun around so that it pointed at his foes and discharged it.

The shot plowed its way through the closely packed forms of the eight natives in the boat, killing four of them.

Ere the others could recover from their dismay, the youth attacked them with his sword, and two more tumbled headlong into the sea.

The two others sprung into the water, and the youth now had only Horlins to contend with.

The desperado, dodging a sweep of the sword, sprung forward to bury his knife in the young officer's heart.

But Tom quickly drew back, and was about putting his sword through the rascal's body, when Horlins, dropping down upon a thwart, sullenly cried:

"Spare my life, sir. I surrender to you."

"Throw away that knife!" ordered the boy.

Horlins threw the knife into the sea.

"Now step up to the mast and set the sail, which are in the boat."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Horlins, and he promptly obeyed.

Tom then seized the tiller and directed the boat on its way.

"For God's sake, sir, if we see the frigate, don't take me aboard of her!" pleaded the wretched man seated in front of him. "I will be court-martialed and shot, or hung at the yard-arm."

"Traitor, you deserve death!"

"Be merciful, sir! Let me off, if we get near the island, and I promise to leave those fierce people I have joined on the first opportunity."

"No, I will not let you off."

"Remember, sir, I will suffer death aboard the Columbia. You have always been known, sir, to be kind to the hands aboard the frigate, and they all like and respect you. For Heaven's sake do nothing to lose their regard."

"I must do my duty."

Again and again did the wretch plead with his young conqueror, but all in vain.

At last he relapsed into silence, sitting with his head bowed upon his breast.

Tom by this time was suffering greatly from hunger and thirst.

There was neither water nor food in the boat, and he knew that unless he should soon see the frigate he would be obliged to head for some islands where his wants could be supplied.

As the long hours of night passed, the youth just before dawn saw something dark looming up before him.

It was an isolated rock which he had more than once noticed while aboard the frigate.

Thinking he might find some kind of shell-fish adhering to the rock, he directed the boat alongside of it.

The dawn was just beginning to steal through the gloom.

"I will have to tie your hands with ropes," he said to Horlins, "while I get out on that rock."

"No need of it, sir," the man answered.

Tom, however, was about to secure his arms in the way he had spoken, when the fellow suddenly sprang out of the boat and ran along the rock, soon disappearing on the other side of it.

"Come back here," called Tom; but there was no response.

Securing the boat by its warp to a spur, Tom got upon the rock, and advanced toward the other side of it to look for Horlins.

Soon he saw the dim form of the latter swiftly stealing round toward the boat.

The youth, comprehending his intention, bounded after him, but ere he could reach him the man had thrown the loop of the warp off the spur round which it was placed and sprung into the boat.

With a defiant shout he now pushed this off from the rock, and Tom saw the vessel rapidly receding from him as the occupant pulled aft the sheet of the sail.

Much provoked at being thus outwitted, and knowing it would be useless to try to reach the receding boat, the youth looked about him.

The rock upon which he stood was about two leagues from the island occupied by his enemies.

The dim light of dawn also revealed to him a sail, just on the edge of a long strip of fog, off the southern seaboard.

He looked long and earnestly at this sail, but he could not make out the vessel plainly enough to decide what kind of a craft she was.

At any rate, he resolved to try and signal her by waving his kerchief.

For some time it was evidently not seen from the distant craft.

Suddenly he saw a faint puff of smoke issuing from her, and heard the dull booming of a gun.

"It is the frigate!" he cried out joyfully.

He continued to signal her, and presently became aware that she was heading towards him.

Meanwhile there was Horlins making all possible speed toward the island.

He would, it was plain, reach the shore before Tom could be picked up by the approaching vessel, for the breeze now was very light, scarcely ruffling the surface of the ocean.

Soon the fog-bank in the offing began to spread, and Tom could no longer see either the island or the distant craft. An hour had passed when he was certain he heard the strokes of paddles.

"The natives are coming to make me a prisoner again. That rascally Horlins has been ashore and told where I am," thought the youth.

He carefully examined the rock for some place of concealment, and discovered a hole on one side of it large enough to creep through.

Near this opening he discovered a few shell-fish adhering to the rock, and with these he partly appeased his hunger.

Then he crept into the hole to perceive that it extended in a slanting, downward direction.

Soon he came to water, which hindered his going further.

He turned, grasped his sword firmly, and here resolved to await the coming of his foes, in case they ventured into this retreat. Owing to its narrow dimensions, but one at a time could attack him here.

Not half an hour passed when the sound of many footsteps indicated that the islanders had arrived.

"Perhaps he is hidden in that hole," came the voice of Horlins.

A moment later the youth beheld dimly the hideous visage of one of the ape-faced men, as he crept towards him with his spear held in his left hand.

The native did not at first see the young officer.

He crept on toward him.

Suddenly his loud cry indicated that he detected the youth.

Up went his spear, but as he hauled it his arm struck the rocky side of the narrow passage, and the weapon passed over Tom's head.

In a moment he was upon the islander with his sword, which he thrust through his body.

The latter now blocked the passage so that those who entered behind him could not pass him.

He sat upon his haunches, stone dead, with his knees drawn up to his chin.

He was finally pulled out of the passage, and soon after another islander with a spear made his appearance before Tom.

The weapon whistled on its way, and had not the youth drawn himself closely against the rugged wall the deadly missile would have passed through him.

As it was it grazed his ribs, but then darting quickly forward he drove his sword to the hilt through the breast of his opponent.

The islanders now seemed to be holding a consultation outside of the retreat.

Then their voices ceased.

A moment later Tom saw them piling some pieces of canvas near the entrance.

This canvas they probably had obtained from the brig's boat which, with Horlins and others in it, had evidently accompanied the islanders' canoe.

The canvas had been partly wetted, and now, as it was ignited, a dense smoke from it was blown into the passage.

Tom was nearly suffocated.

He crawled nearer to the entrance, but derived little benefit from this.

His brain seemed to spin round and round; he gasped for breath.

He had resolved to make a spring from the place and attack his foes, preferring to perish, if he must, while fighting with them, when he heard a sort of roar and a loud, deep voice.

Then came the thunder of a gun, followed by the whizzing of a shot, and groans and shrieks from the natives.

Shot after shot followed, and he heard the yells of the natives dying away in the distance as they receded from the rock.

There could be no mistake.

They had been fired upon by some armed vessel, and were beating a retreat.

Tom hastily crept forward along the passage, and with his sword pushed the still smoking pile of canvas to one side.

Then he sprang through the opening, and as his vision, which had been half blinded by the smoke, was restored to him, he beheld, looming up through the mist, not five ships' lengths off, his own frigate, the Columbia.

CHAPTER VIII.

THURLINE'S PROMISE.

A WELCOME sight to the youth, after the perilous adventures he had undergone, was this huge ship, lying with her main-yard aback so near him.

He could see the sailors forward on the fore-castle deck, with the grim old sheet-anchor man among them, while the booms and lower rigging were filled with nimble tars, all peering through the mist and gazing toward the rock.

Aft, on the quarter-deck, stood a group of officers, and near them, hanging to the mizzen-shrouds, were several little midshipmen.

Even the marines who had been loitering on the spar-deck, burning their muskets with pipe-clay, stood upon cannonade slides, craning their necks above the high bulwarks.

Tom waved his arms, shouted and was seen by his many ship-mates.

Then a ringing cheer was given, and while the tars were yet waving their hats about their heads, the boatswain's pipe was heard, and the order, "Third cutter away!" rung hoarsely through the ship.

A few seconds later a cutter, with the first lieutenant in the stern-sheets, was headed for the rock.

"Ay, ay, Mr. Trueman, glad enough I am to see you again!" cried the lieutenant, as the two saluted each other. "We had all given you up for lost."

Tom was soon in the cutter and back aboard the frigate.

So great a favorite was he with the sailors that it was with difficulty, as they joyfully gazed upon him, that they could restrain themselves from disregarding all rules of discipline by rushing up to him for a grasp of his hand.

Here he was, alive and well, their brave young sailing-master, whom they had for several days mourned as dead.

He walked aft, touched his hat to the captain, and promptly made a report of his adventures since leaving the frigate.

"You have done well, Mr. Trueman," said the captain. "Consider yourself exempt from duty for forty-eight hours, which will give you time to rest and refresh yourself."

Tom's brother officers had much to say to him ere he could go down into the ward-room, but at last he found himself in his little apartment, partaking of the biscuits and hot coffee which the steward had been ordered to send him.

Soon after he was in his hammock, swaying with the rolling of the ship, fast asleep.

When he awoke he changed his soiled uniform for one in good condition, and mounted to the spar deck.

The sun now was setting, and as the mist had cleared Tom could see the island from which he had escaped lying broad off the starboard bow.

He went up to the captain, and touching his cap, requested to be permitted to resume duty at once.

"Upon my word, sir," said Captain Marlow, smiling, "you show more regard for duty than any officer I ever met with. Who else is there among them that would not jump at the chance of being permitted to be exempt for so many hours?"

"Believe me, sir," answered Tom, gravely, "when I say that in my opinion you need the services of all your officers on so trying an occasion."

"Trying? I don't understand you, sir," said the captain, glancing over the sea. "I am not aware that the occasion is very trying at present."

"I allude to the fire-ship, sir. In my opinion that mysterious craft will soon again be sent to destroy the frigate."

The captain pointed to a reef between him and the island.

"She cannot come out to us from that direction, at all events," he said. "Besides, I think by pouring a few broadsides into the vessel I could destroy her, or at any rate damage her, so that she could do no mischief."

"Excuse me, sir, but I doubt it. I have heard that she is armored so as to be shot-proof."

"That vessel cannot be so armored that incessant hammering will not damage her."

"True, sir, if you have a chance of so hammering her ere she set fire to you."

"We must trust to rapid maneuvering to avoid her. That is all we can do, sir."

In the morning I will send a force of sailors and marines to attack those strange ape-faced people, and break up their rendezvous, capture the leader, and thus stop their depredations on passing vessels. Then the fire-ship, which is evidently hidden in some concealed bay, shall be destroyed, and there'll be an end of it."

"I hope, sir, I will have a command in the expedition."

"Certainly. The launch, full of sailors and marines, shall be put under your orders."

All through that night a good watch was kept, lest the fire-ship should pounce upon the frigate unawares.

Several false alarms were given by the lookouts, who, in common with all the rest of the sailors, dreaded the mysterious, invulnerable craft.

At dawn, immediately after breakfast, the lieutenant of marines mustered his men. As the drum was beat, and they paraded, the captain of the party, with keen satisfaction, surveyed the neat uniforms and glittering muskets of his soldiers.

The first and second cutters, together with the launch, were piped down, as the frigate's main yard was hauled aback, and soon they were on their way to the island, which was now about half a league distant.

Tom, when the launch which he commanded reached the shore, sprang out, and before long, with the first lieutenant, after the first and second cutters also had come up, he was moving along the beach at the head of sixty stout, resolute men, with thirty marines, under the command of their captain, marching on their left.

Carefully did Tom search for the rendezvous of the islanders, but he could now discover no signs of it.

For hours the rocks and caves along the shore were closely scrutinized, but all in vain.

As the youth, while in the outlaws' cavern, had been unable to take bearings of it, he was at a loss to determine where it was.

Meanwhile not one native—male or female—was in sight.

All at once Tom, while a little apart from his companions, fancied he saw a human head suddenly projected above a rock near the beach, some yards off, and as suddenly withdrawn.

He rushed toward the rock, but when he reached it there was no person to be seen behind it.

The youth, much surprised, looked about him.

Soon, as he stepped upon a rocky slab, projecting over the sea, he beheld a human form going down under the surface.

Thinking it was one of the islanders, who might be forced to give him information, the boy resolved to try to capture him.

Having deposited his coat, hat, shoes and sword, in a hollow among some rocks near him, he dove and was soon close to the receding form.

Eluding him, however, it presently rose to the surface of the water, in an underground cavern.

As Tom came up to the side of the fugitive, the dim light stealing into the retreat, showed him that the person was none other than Thurline—the girl queen.

Swimming to a rocky shelf, she drew herself upon it, motioning the youth there too.

Like a true naiad of the sea looked this girl, in spite of her rather masculine attire, which consisted of a light tunic with a sash about the waist and loosely flowing trousers.

Her long hair glittered as if sown with sparkling gems, and her eyes shown like stars.

The moment Tom was on the rocky shelf by her side she looked at him and said:

"The crew of your vessel are doomed."

"No," responded Tom; "were there two hundred of your people—and I judge there are not half so many—my sailors and marines, who are well armed, would soon vanquish them."

"I do not allude to them, but to those aboard your ship. My father's band number a hundred, but they will not meet your skilled party in open fight."

"What, then, is their intention?"

"Do you think I am traitress enough to tell you—you who deserted me, after promising to be mine?"

The frank boldness of this declaration would have surprised the youth had the speaker been a white maiden.

But he knew that the ways of the island women were different from those of his own people of the gentler sex.

"My promise was made under the influence of a drug. The water you gave me to drink must have been drugged," he answered.

"Well, what then? Do you mean to say you have changed your mind?"

"Yes."

A look of blended grief and anger came over Thurline's beautiful face.

"So you do not care for me?" she said. "You do not like me?"

"I did not say that I did not like you," answered Tom, touched by the despairing tone of her voice.

Thurline's eyes flashed.

"You shall yet be mine!" she cried. "For your sake I will do you a great service."

"And what is that?" inquired Tom.

"I will enable you to save your frigate."

"To save the frigate? Is she already in danger?"

"Yes, from the fire-ship. While your men are here my father intends to steal out in his fire-ship and set fire to the frigate, as he did to the Spanish brig-of-war."

"And how am I to save her? There is no risk I will not run to do that."

Thurline looked at him with admiring eyes.

"Brave boy! Well worthy to be the husband of an island queen!" she cried.

Tom colored.

He was firmly resolved that he would never marry this girl, and under other circumstances he would have said so; but it now seemed to him that the salvation of hundreds of his brave shipmates justified him in not responding to her last remark.

"You will incur great peril in trying to save your ship, but Thurline will be ever on the watch ready to shield you even with her life."

"I suppose there is no time to lose," said Tom.

"No. My father, even now, is making his preparations to sail."

"You will enable me to get aboard that fire-ship?"

"I will try to. Remember, I may not succeed, but I will do my best to get you there."

"Which way are we to go? I am ready."

"Wait until your men have left that part of the shore above us. They saw you vanish behind the rock, and they will think you fell off the slab projecting over the water, and which is very slippery."

"But they know I am a good swimmer."

"It matters not. They will think you were dragged under by a shark."

Fully an hour passed ere Thurline ventured out of the water cavern. She swam along beneath the surface in such a way that she could obtain a view of the shore.

As she had expected not a man now was to be seen there.

Doubtless all had given Tom up for lost, and left the place.

"Come, it is time," said Thurline, after she had returned to the sailing-master.

Both soon rose to the surface of the sea and swam to the shore.

Tom looked about him.

He saw his coat, hat, shoes and sword lying in the cleft of the rock where he had thrown them, and where they had escaped the attention of his men.

He could hear the voices of the latter in the distance coming from the shrubbery of a thicket beyond, but not one of them was in sight.

"Come. Follow me," said Thurline, taking a direction along the beach where it was overhung by a ridge of high rocks.

CHAPTER IX.

ABOARD THE FIRE-SHIP.

Tom closely followed his guide, keenly surveying every part of the locality he passed in order to keep it in mind.

Thurline, with a grace and swiftness he could not help admiring, kept on for at least half an hour, when she suddenly paused beneath the base of a cliff which rose high from the shore and seemed to cross the island from one side to the other.

"Who would suspect there was an opening in this rock?" she said.

The rugged wall rose steeply, presenting an apparently blank surface to the sea.

"Not I," answered Tom. "It is easy to see there is no opening."

But even as he spoke the girl pulled a thick wire, which had been concealed by a projecting cleft, and a small, rocky door, which had been so arranged as to seem to form a part of the rugged wall itself, swung open, showing an aperture large enough to admit a human being.

"Enter," said Thurline.

For only an instant did Tom hesitate.

He saw by the reproachful expression of the girl's face that she had no thought of treachery.

Entering through the opening, he found himself in a dark passage.

Then Thurline having closed the rocky door, passed him and moved on.

The passage was of great length, but at last pausing before a rocky wall which seemed to be its termination, the girl opened another door and looked forth.

Partly reclosing it, she said:

"We cannot go out now. The people are very busy in the concealed bay and would see us if we did. But look through the crevice I have left between the door and the wall and you will be astonished."

Tom complying with her request gave a cry of surprise.

Ahead of him he beheld what resembled a lake, encircled, apparently, by cliffs rising very high and almost perpendicular, except on that side which was probably toward the sea, where this encircling wall of rock was much lower and more broken. In several places fronting the lake Tom saw the openings evidently of deep caverns, while upon the water he was astonished to observe several fine barks and schooners.

At a little distance from the latter lay a dark object resembling the body of a large black fish projecting above the surface.

One glance at this object was enough to show Tom what it was.

It was the iron hull of the fire-ship.

"How could that craft get there?" inquired the youth. "How could any of the vessels I see reach that sheet of water, locked in as it is by those cliffs?"

"Through an opening facing the sea," answered Thurline.

"I can see no opening—nothing but solid rock," said Tom.

"True you cannot see it because it is closed," answered the girl.

"A part of the wall of rock facing the sea is but twelve feet high, and has an opening large enough for a ship to pass through, but there is a piece of tent canvas extended across it and so painted as to resemble the rest of the rock. This canvas is so arranged that when one of our vessels approaches it can be rolled to one side and thus allow it to pass through into the bay. You can perceive that every vessel is anchored opposite the loftier parts of the rocky wall, so that its masts could not be seen from the sea."

"Upon my word your father is wonderfully ingenious. Few men would ever have thought of so simple yet skillful a contrivance."

"The fire-ship is his most masterly invention."

"It is really a strange, a mysterious affair, and I am impatient to get aboard of such a craft."

"You seem to forget the peril. Certain death awaits you if my father discovers you there."

"I am, as I said, willing to run any risk to save my shipmates and their vessel."

"Brave and gallant boy!"

"Bah! you make too much of it. Any of our officers would be willing to dare the same thing."

"Not with the same indifference."

"Tell me," said Tom, quickly changing the subject, "what should hinder my men from climbing to the top of the cliff which surrounds this bay and looking down into it?"

"Because the cliff wall on its other sides is as steep and smooth as the parts you see rising from the water. It is inaccessible."

"Truly your bay is well concealed," said Tom, with a seaman's admiration.

He kept his gaze upon the iron hull of the fire-ship, on the deck of which he could see a number of forms moving hurriedly about.

"How are you to get me aboard of her unseen?" he inquired of his companion.

"Wait, and you shall know."

At last a long boat containing the persons he had observed on the vessel's deck put off for the shore, and they finally landed, to move along the beach to a part of the cliff where there was an opening, through which they entered.

"Those are my father and his sailors. They have gone to have dinner in a large cave in the heart of the cliff. There is no person to see us now. Come."

She led the way to a small canoe which lay by the beach, and Tom was soon paddled to the fire-ship.

The man-ropes over the side enabled him to climb aboard, and, by the same means, Thurline, as active as any young man-o'-warsman, followed him.

He now discovered that the deck of this vessel was made of iron slabs tightly riveted together, while the steel plates forming the armor of the bulwarks and the sides were so thick that it would require many shots to even slightly damage them.

Excepting the windlass forward, the iron surface of the deck was unbroken by any projection, save in the after-part, where Tom beheld a sort of large iron cap, probably covering the opening or hatchway leading into the vessel's hold, and also in the center from which projected the end of an iron pipe. Aft was the same ring-bolt to which

he had secured his hawser several days before, and thus, by anchoring this craft, saved his ship from destruction.

Thurline stooping over the iron cap turned it several times from left to right, and thus dislodged it from the circular combings over which it fitted. Though very light, it was strongly made, and coated with a sort of red paint, which the girl informed her companion was fire-proof.

Tom now beheld a staircase leading downward, and when he had descended a few steps, the girl reclosed the cap, which fitted so perfectly as scarcely to admit a drop of water into the hold, when it was shut and the vessel under the sea.

The first object which here caught the youth's attention was a curious engine on his right provided with a row of small pipes, all pointing forward over a second iron deck, extending the full length of the vessel and about three feet below it.

"There," said Thurline, "is the secret of our being able to remain in this vessel when she is in a blaze."

"I don't understand."

"Well, then, the engine you notice is so arranged that by turning the wheel you see attached to it a man can keep a fresh supply of water, which the pump draws up from the sea, washing along between the two decks. There is an opening forward, through which the water runs through a scupper-hole, so that it has not time to get hot. The constant fresh supply of water keeps the inside of the vessel cool, while the flames are raging on deck."

"But what causes those flames? How do you make the fire?"

"You noticed the pipe projecting from the upper deck?"

"Yes."

"That pipe is connected with a large tank below, which we endeavor to keep full of oil. This oil is pumped up and rushes out in a stream, flooding the decks. A man sets fire to it by darting a torch upward and inward, so that it will fall on the deck. He throws it out of the dead-light under the gangway. This dead-light, when closed, is water-tight."

"Is that the oil-tank there?" inquired Tom, pointing to a huge cask-shaped vessel in the center of the hold.

"Yes; and the pump by means of which the oil is sent up through the pipe is on the other side of it."

"I should think your people would find it hard to keep a sufficient supply of oil for their purpose."

"That is their chief difficulty. Often they cannot make use of the fire-ship for that reason. Lately, however, they captured a Spanish bark—the one you have seen in the bay—containing a cargo of petroleum, so that they now have enough burning material to last for some time."

The two soon were in the vessel's hold. It was lighted by a couple of swinging lanterns which shed a bright radiance through every part of it.

Thurline conducted Tom forward, where there was a hand wheel of solid brass which shone like gold.

"This wheel is connected with the steering gear. By this the vessel is both steered and propelled."

"What?" cried the youth, in astonishment. "You don't mean that this heavy craft is moved by hand?"

"Not entirely; but partly it is so moved. In that little circular iron inclosure there," she added, pointing toward the center of the hold, "is a small, nearly noiseless steam engine, which, assisted by the clock-like intricate machinery of this vessel, works by compressed air, and the movement of the brass wheel has power to send this vessel through the water at the rate of twelve knots an hour. The machinery turns a paddle-wheel under the forward part of the ship."

"And where does the steam go to?"

"Through an escape-pipe to the upper hold, where it is soon condensed and falls in drops."

"And how does your father contrive to get the craft down under water?"

"Simply by opening a valve at the bottom of another compartment under this hold, and thus filling it with water."

"How does he open this valve?"

"By means of a wire connected with a spring reaching up into the hold where we are."

And she directed Tom's attention to a knob not far off, which she stated was attached to the wire.

"But what prevents the water from entering here?"

"The compartment I speak of is shaped like that of a diving-bell. The resistance of the air keeps the water from rising as high as this. When he wants to come up to the surface again, my father has the water pumped out between decks by means of the same pump which lets in the supply that keeps the hold cool, and by pressing down the knob the valve below is closed."

"Now tell me how I am to save the frigate."

"You will have to get at the machinery connected with the paddle-wheel, and with a file sever a steel rod which you will see. This rod, being cut, the vessel cannot be properly steered until the damage shall have been repaired, which it will take several days to do."

"If you will give me a file, and show me how I am to get at the rod, I will commence at once."

"Yes, your life depends upon your commencing at once, for the vessel soon after leaving this bay will be put under the surface of the sea, and unless you finish your task before then, you will be in great peril of drowning, as the machinery will then be in the water."

She advanced to a large square box near them, shaped like a chest, and raised the lid pointing down at the machinery which was faintly

revealed through an opening thus disclosed below, and hanging near which was a sort of rope-ladder.

The light from the hold but dimly showed the machinery.

"You say I would probably drown if here when the vessel is under water," remarked Tom, "but it seems to me I could then climb into the box."

"No, for there is a revolving wheel with sharp spikes, which might catch on your garments and hold you, unless the rod was severed."

"Give me a file, then, and I will at once commence work."

From a shelf, on one side of the hold, Thurline obtained a file and a lantern, the latter of which she lighted.

Tom got upon the ladder and took both the lantern and the file.

"I believe you are safe enough at present, for I do not think the vessel will be ready to sail for several hours," said the girl.

She stood looking down at Tom, while with the lantern slung to his arm he commenced to file the rod he saw near him.

He was still at work when voices and footsteps were heard above, followed by the noise of the boat being hoisted to the davits.

"My father and his people have come," said the girl, shutting down the lid of the box and carelessly leaning over it.

CHAPTER X.

TOM'S PERIL.

THE captain of the fire-ship soon entered the hold.

"You here?" he said, on seeing his daughter. "When did you come aboard?"

"A few minutes ago," she answered.

"Well, unless you want to go out with me, you had better return ashore."

"I mean to go with you, but I suppose it will be hours before you sail."

"No, we are ready to sail now, as soon as our anchor can be lifted."

As he spoke the noise made by his men as they worked the windlass was heard.

Half an hour later the anchor was a-trip, and seizing the brass wheel, as his engineer entered the steam compartment, the captain commenced to turn it.

In an instant the sharp click-click of the machinery was heard, and gradually gathering way the craft moved toward the canvas-covered opening between the cliffs.

As she approached the canvas, it was rolled aside far enough to allow her to pass, by men stationed for that purpose on a projecting shelf of the wall of rock.

On she went, and was soon out to sea, her captain, as he steered, keeping a sharp lookout for the frigate through the clear glass of the head-light—window—in the vessel's bow.

There was now a slight mist upon the water, and the ship could not be seen until the captain had rounded a projecting headland.

Then he caught sight of the huge war craft directly ahead and not a mile off.

Not far from him stood his crew.

These were not the ape-faced men, but were adventurers who, like Horlins, had joined the party for the sake of the profits of plunder.

They consisted of Manila men and other islanders, with several whites, among whom was Horlins.

Numbering eighteen men in all, they stood clad in their loose-flowing trousers and low caps, as motionless and silent as so many statues, awaiting their captain's orders.

Fierce looking fellows they were apparently—as strong and active as tigers, with cutlasses and pistols in the belts about their waists.

Meanwhile Tom was busily at work with his file.

The noise made by the raising of the anchor had previously not been sufficient to drown the scraping sound of the instrument, but now the grinding and clicking of the machinery enabled him to use the file without danger of detection.

The swaying motion of the rod greatly interfered with his movements, as also did the spiked wheel.

This wheel, which revolved rapidly, was within a few inches of his body all the time.

The spikes upon it were as sharply pointed as needles, and he was obliged to use the greatest care to prevent their catching in his garments.

Should they do so they would hold him, and penetrating his flesh, jam him up against the rod until he should perish.

Several times the swaying of the rope-ladder on which he stood almost brought him in contact with the perilous wheel.

Brave as he was he could not help shuddering at his danger.

Nevertheless he phed the file with a steady hand.

The rod was a tough one, and he feared he would not succeed in his task in time.

In fact, but two-thirds of the rod were severed when he heard the captain of the craft shout the order for the opening of the valve which would let in the sea water and sink the vessel a few feet beneath the surface.

So quickly was the command obeyed that, before Tom could ascend to the top of the rope-ladder, down went the iron hull.

The water roaring and foaming about the youth almost swept him from his position.

Then one of the spikes of the revolving wheel caught in his coat, and he felt himself about to be jerked by it from the ladder.

He gave himself up for lost.

The sharp point of the wheel would in another instant penetrate his body.

"It is all over! I am gone!" was the thought that passed through his mind.

Just then there was a snapping sound as the partly severed rod gave way, and the wheel swung away from him.

It took with it a fragment of his coat, and thus released he was able to draw himself up to the top of the box, out of the foaming vortex of waters, which, in another second, would have risen over his head and drowned him.

Unaware at present that there was anything wrong with the machinery, the captain continued to work the wheel he grasped.

He soon perceived that his craft was yawing strangely from side to side.

"Something is wrong!" he said to Thurline, who was still leaning over the box.

"No, father, it is only the action of the tide, I think," answered the girl.

"Up again with the hull! We shall soon see!" cried the captain.

The man ordered to do so closed the valve, and the clang of the pump was heard as the sea-water was pumped out.

Then the vessel rose to the surface.

"Now look and see what is the matter," said the captain to his daughter. "The machinery must be out of order."

Thurline raised the lid of the box, and looking significantly down at Tom, who was crouching on the ladder, she answered:

"No, everything seems to be right."

The captain, gazing through the deadlight, perceived, however, that the craft was heading at right angles with the frigate, instead of towards it.

"Here, take the wheel!" he called to Horlins, "while I have a look at the steering-gear."

"Ay, ay, sir!" promptly answered Horlins.

He sprang to the wheel, and the captain advanced to the box.

"Stand aside!" he said to Thurline.

But the latter, knowing that if he looked down through the box he would see Tom, said quickly:

"What need of your looking? There is nothing the matter."

Her father impatiently pushed her aside, and raising the lid, saw at once that the machinery was out of order.

Of course he also saw Tom crouching on the ladder.

"Treachery!" he cried, fiercely. "It is your doing!" he added, turning to his daughter.

The latter caught his arm.

"Do not harm that boy!" she said. "You are right; it was I who led him here."

"You shall soon see what I will do with him!" answered the infuriated captain. "This way, men!"

The men came thronging to the spot.

"Haul him up!" ordered their commander.

Tom drew his sword.

"The first who lays a hand on me dies!" he said in a determined voice.

The captain laughed hoarsely, as he pulled a pistol from his belt and aimed it at the young officer.

All at once, however, he replaced it in his belt.

He knew that if he shot Tom where he now was, his body would fall down into the complicated machinery, and becoming fastened in it, derange the works still more ere it could be extricated.

It was therefore necessary that the youth should be hauled up into the hold before he was killed.

"I tell you to seize him and draw him up!" he shouted fiercely to the men.

One of them leaned down and caught Tom by the collar, but the next moment he drew back with a hoarse cry and fell dead on the floor of the hold.

Tom's sword had pierced him to the heart.

"He has the advantage of us, sir, as you will not have him slain where he is," cried one of the sailors. "He can stab us all, one after the other, if we try to pull him up."

This was true, and the captain and his men now held a consultation as to what was best to be done.

Meanwhile Thurline, who was willing to sacrifice the craft and the lives of all her crew for the sake of the youth she loved, quickly made her way to the deck and waved her kerchief to the frigate's people, who, as the Columbia was now but about thirty fathoms distant, saw her plainly.

As she was within speaking distance she shouted:

"Mr. Trueman, your sailing-master is in danger aboard this vessel. Send men to his rescue if you would save his life!"

The next moment she was seized by her father, who had observed her just as she was passing through the circular hatchway.

"Traitor, you deserve death for this!" he cried, "and though you are my adopted daughter, you will have to die when we return ashore! Our people will have it so, even though I should try to oppose them."

"Ay, ay, she must die!" shouted some of the sailors who had followed their captain to the deck.

The girl was seized by her father and forced back into the hold.

At the same moment the piping of a boatswain's whistle was heard aboard the frigate, followed by the command to lower one of the cutters.

The captain smiled grimly.

"I will make it hot for them," he said "if they try to board us."

A look of despair came over Thurline's face.

She knew that the speaker meant to fire his craft.

The captain now ordered two of his men to keep guard over the

girl, while he returned to the box, followed by those who had accompanied him to the deck.

The sailors were still consulting as to how they were to get Tom up into the hold.

"If one of the men will take this wheel, Captain Rulok," said Horlins, "I think I can find a way to draw that rascal up."

"Take the wheel, one of you," ordered the captain.

A man took the wheel and Horlins then seized the end of one of several coils of rope to leeward.

He made a slip noose on the end of this rope.

"He will cut that with his sword before you can get it around him," said the captain.

"No, sir, not if we are quick enough," was the reply.

The rope was a tough one, and Horlins threw it with a swiftness and dexterity which speedily brought it round Tom's neck.

The youth slashed at the rope with his sword, but its perpendicular position as it was being hauled hindered the effects of his blows.

In a few seconds a powerful, violent jerk of the rope brought him up on the deck of the hold.

Before he was in condition to offer resistance he was disarmed and his wrists bound with cords.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

"Now you are in my power," said the captain to the prostrate youth, "and your fate shall be a terrible one, for not only have you ruined my plan to destroy the frigate, but you are the cause of my daughter's treachery."

"I am not afraid to die," Tom calmly answered. "I have accomplished my purpose, and have saved my ship."

The captain went on deck.

The cutter from the frigate was rapidly approaching.

In her were ten men armed with cutlasses and pistols, with the first lieutenant and a midshipman in the stern-sheets.

"Fools! they think by boarding me," muttered Captain Rulok, "to make an easy capture of this craft. Let them come. They will soon discover their mistake. Fortunate it is that I saw Thurline go and summon them—that they did not get aboard, as she intended they should, without my knowledge."

Then, walking to the side, he shouted:

"Cutter ahoy! What do you want?"

"We want our sailing-master, Mr. Trueman," was the reply. "Better stop your craft, so that we can get aboard without trouble."

"It shall be done," answered the captain.

He went to the circular hatchway and shouted to the man below at the wheel to stop moving it.

The iron hull soon lay to, swaying up and down with the slight heaving of the sea.

The lieutenant surveyed the singular craft with much curiosity.

As the boat glided alongside the captain lowered the man-ropes in the gangway for him to descend to the deck.

"Follow me, boys," cried the officer as he clambered aboard.

The captain now had disappeared.

The lieutenant and his men looked about them in surprise at the deserted deck.

At the same moment a hand thrust through one of the now open water-proof dead-lights severed the cutter's warp with a knife, and the boat drifted away from the vessel.

"Boys," cried the coxswain, "we are caught in some trap."

As he spoke torrents of oil poured from the mouth of the projecting pipe which has been mentioned, rapidly flooding the deck.

Then from the open dead-light a flaming torch was dexterously darted upward so that it fell inward on the deck.

In a moment the oil there began to blaze.

The men rushed to the side to leap overboard.

But a ringing voice now was heard coming from below.

It was a voice which all the hearers recognized as that of their beloved sailing-master, Tom Trueman.

"Lift the iron cap and come into the hold. Here you will be safe from the fire."

But the captain had fastened down the cap by means of an iron chain attached to the under part of it.

Fortunately the two men who had been guarding Thurline were now looking with the others toward their captain.

The maiden, seeing her chance, bounded up the staircase and unhooked the chain.

The flames had not yet reached the after part of the deck.

As the girl unfastened the chain, the lieutenant raised the cap.

"This way, boys," he shouted, as sword in hand he sprang upon the staircase.

Captain Rulok placed himself at the head of his men, who, as stated, were well armed and numbered fifteen, beside those who were working the pump to keep a fresh supply of water for cooling the hold.

With the lieutenant and the midshipman there were twelve of the cutter's crew in all.

Headed by their commander, they poured rapidly down the stairway as Thurline descended quickly to make way for them.

Rulok aimed a pistol at the head of his adopted daughter.

"Your treachery deserves instant death!" he cried.

The sharp report of the pistol was heard, but the bullet passed over the girl's head.

Tom, who had been left to himself when Rulok's men gathered about their captain, had worked so vigorously at the cords about his arms that he had succeeded in unfastening them.

They had been hastily and carelessly secured, it having been the intention of his enemy to transfer him to the blazing deck as soon as the oil should be ignited.

But the boarding of the vessel by the man-of-war's men had, as can be seen, prevented this.

The moment he found his arms free Tom had sprung up.

As the captain aimed the pistol at Thurline, he had struck him an upward blow on the wrist of the hand holding the weapon.

"Now, men, let them have it!" rang his voice as he sprang to the lieutenant's side, waving his drawn sword, which had been left lying near him when he was bound.

"Trueman, forever!" shouted Mr. Trumble, the little midshipman, who had accompanied the officer of the cutter.

The crew gave a rousing cheer.

The sight of their beloved sailing-master seemed to inspire them with renewed zeal for the combat.

The two parties met in conflict.

The island men fought desperately, but the trained man-o'-war's-men delivered their blows with a precision and a dexterity that was hard to withstand.

"Fight on, my braves, fight on!" shouted the captain of the fire-ship.

"Down with them! Leave not a man of them alive!" cried the young sailing-master.

"Ay, kill every one of the piratical dogs!" echoed the lieutenant.

"To the death—fight to the death! Fight for our beautiful fire-ship!" roared the captain again, as he wielded his sword with such rapidity that it resembled the flashing of lightning.

The cutter's coxswain found himself face to face with the traitor, Horlins.

His surprise at beholding this person for a moment unnerved his arm.

The deserter's cutlass would have passed through his body but for the little midshipman, who sprang upon him, driving his dagger between his shoulders.

Horlins fell like a log to the floor.

"Well, done, Mr. Trumble!" cried Tom, as he dashed aside a cutlass which otherwise would have swept the youngster's head from his shoulders.

The combat became still more close and deadly.

The captain of the fire-ship fought like a demon, and his trumpet-like voice seemed to inspire his followers with superhuman strength.

But the rapid, steady blows of the frigate's men finally began to tell upon their adversaries.

The clash of steel, the shuffling of feet, and the yells and execrations of the combatants were the sounds now heard.

Every pistol had been discharged, and at such close quarters, with the cutlasses constantly in use, there was no chance to reload.

Five of the fire-ship's people lay dead on the floor of the hold, and three of the cutter's crew had fallen.

The skill of the man-of-war's-men in parrying the furious strokes of their opponents, and the effective blows they gave in return, finally drove their enemies aft.

There they made a last desperate stand, but in vain.

Man after man of their number was cut down.

"Yield! Surrender!" shouted Tom, as with a tremendous sweep of his weapon he shivered the captain's sword to the hilt.

"Ay, it is time you did," came the piping voice of little Midshipman Trumble.

The captain threw the fragment of his sword into the lad's face.

Then, as the four men—all that were left of his fighting party—threw down their swords, he seemed possessed of the rage of a demon.

"Not one of you shall live to boast of his victory," he roared, in a voice of thunder. "The fire-ship shall be your coffin as well as mine."

Snapping quickly, he pressed the knob connecting with the wire which opened the valve in the compartment below.

Then, seizing a ringbolt near it, he pulled up a round, closely-fitting plate of iron, thus disclosing a circular hole.

"Quick! close that opening, or we are lost!" shrieked Thurline to the man-o-war's men.

But Captain Rulok threw himself upon the iron plate, and ere he could be shoved aside, the fire-ship sank rapidly beneath the surface.

The concave apparatus, like a diving-bell, under the hold, now open at the top, owing to the removal of the iron plate, no longer resisting the upward pressure of the water, this poured into the hollow compartment with a surging noise like thunder.

The plate was replaced too late. It flew up like a shot before the force of the incoming torrent.

Down, down, lower and lower sank the fatal craft.

Avananches of water poured into the hold, while the loud hissing of the quenched flames sounded above as if thousands of writhing serpents were in conflict.

Gurgling shrieks broke from Thurline, and from such of the men as were swept off their feet by the dashing, foaming torrents of water.

"Quick! Here on the staircase we may have a chance for life!" shouted Tom.

As he spoke he seized the boy Trumble, who was about to be swept away from his side, and dragged him up the stair-way toward the cab.

Half a dozen of the cutter's crew, with the lieutenant, clung to the stairs.

The rapidity with which the heavy iron hull went down soon caused the water to rush up with irresistible force about the imperilled party.

Filling the hold, it sent the cap bursting from the combings about which Thurline had replaced it after the boarders descended the staircase.

The young sailing-master, with Trumble, the lieutenant and four of the men, were shot upward through the opening with tremendous velocity.

Round and round in the whirlpool caused by the sinking craft did they spin for a few seconds; then, as the vortex subsided, they rose gasping to the surface.

All except the lieutenant could swim.

Tom, as soon as he could recover from the confusion of sense caused by his submersion, struck out for the struggling, sinking officer, and kept his head above water until a boat, which ere now had been sent from the frigate, arrived and picked him up with his shipmates.

To Captain Marlow, who commanded this boat in person, the sailing-master made a report of the events which have been described.

The boat was long kept near the place where the craft had sunk, but, although many articles that had been in the hold rose to view, the bodies of those who had perished were never seen again.

Far down beneath the surface were they destined to remain in that doomed fire-ship, which had proved to be their coffin, and which was even now at the bottom of the sea.

Before night, after Tom had refreshed himself and obtained some rest, he went ashore with a crew, in a cutter which was placed under his command. A brief search soon brought him in sight of the sailors and marines there, who were still vainly searching for the islanders' rendezvous.

On seeing the sailing-master whom they had thought was lost, they gave a simultaneous shout of joyful surprise.

Tom explained matters to them, and then, not doubting that he could now find the concealed bay, he put himself at their head, and reaching the beach, followed the tracks which Thurline and he had previously left in the sand when she guided him to the secret retreat.

By the same way he had been conducted to the shore of the concealed bay, he finally arrived there again, this time with his armed followers.

Remembering the cave he had seen Rulok and his men enter, after leaving the fire-ship while at anchor in the bay, he led his party to the opening.

Moving swiftly along they soon came to a large rocky apartment, in which they found the ape-faced men collected.

Their appearance was a complete surprise to their foes, and after a brief combat the whole number were made prisoners.

There were among them several handsome females, whose husbands belonged to the captured party, and the old French chaplain whom Tom had previously seen was also there.

But the youth looked around him in vain for Bella, the beautiful Spanish girl.

He asked the prisoners where she was, but they refused to tell him.

The chaplain, however, said to him in a low voice:

"Ere she left us, Thurline chained the girl to a rock, in the passage, where you will remember you had so narrow an escape the other day."

"Then she has perished by this time!" cried Tom in dismay.

"No, if you make haste you may save her," said the chaplain. "The tide is entering, but I doubt if it has yet drowned her."

Tom hastened in the direction pointed out by his informant, accompanied by several of the men, one of whom brought with him a coil of rope and an ax found in the cave.

The youth finally reached the aperture overlooking the narrow passage.

Already he could hear the rush of the incoming tide, and looking down he beheld, by the light of a lantern he carried, the beautiful upturned face of the poor girl, who chained to the rock was already immersed in the water to her breast.

Tom quickly fastened the rope to a spur; then taking the ax he descended. Arrived at the girl's side he fastened the rope about his chest.

Then with a few powerful blows of the ax he severed the chain from the rock.

"I am saved!" cried Bella.

"You will be in a moment," answered the youth. "Permit me to hold you while my men pull us up."

He raised her in his arms and the two were soon hauled to the opening above.

Before many hours, Tom and his party with the rescued girl and the prisoners were aboard the frigate.

Next day the ape-faced men were surrendered to the authorities of another island, and in due time the captured vessels in the concealed bay were restored to their rightful owners.

Thus the baneful organization which for some time had existed under the leadership of the vengeful Captain Rulok was forever destroyed.

The young sailing-master, Tom Trueman, who had been the means of accomplishing this good work, and who by his daring and presence of mind had succeeded in saving the frigate from the terrible fire-ship, was rewarded with the promotion to a lieutenancy.

He had taken a great liking to Bella Carlos, the beautiful Spanish girl whom he had rescued, and finally, a few years after she had been restored to her friends, she became his wife.

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